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Prologue

SteamKit crouched, trying her best not to fall over, or mess up...Again. Her sister, DuskKit, was behind her, hunched over a pile of leaves as if they were herbs. DuskKit seemed to always be interested in that kind of stuff, but SteamKit thought of it differently. She wanted to be a warrior, just like the great warriors of The Wing Of Stars like the stories the queens told in the nursery. SteamKit pounced on the moss ball she called prey, it was practice. Just for now. Then, maybe in a couple of moons, she would be hunting real prey with the CrypticClan warriors.

DuskKit watched her sister from afar, "Marigold...Uhm...Poppy seeds..." She mumbled, shifting through the foliage. Though, it wasn't real herbs. It would do for now.

"DuskKit! SteamKit!" A voice called. Their father.

SteamKit turned around to face the tom, who was holding a mouse in his jaws.

"A mouse! Wow!" DuskKit gaped, leaving her pile of leaves.

AshTail purred, crouching down. Yet, there was a dark, far look in his eyes, as if something was being taken from him, that he didn't want to give up. She watched her sister approach AshTail, leaving her corner to follow DuskKit.

"Good morning," AshTail dressed himself in a fake smile, hiding his sadness best he could.

SteamKit purred. Their father would barely visit them anymore, because of his rank as a warrior, and all the responsibilities he had with CrypticClan. And their mother...SilentStream...Oh, she passed a long time ago...AshTail had grieved with them, as much as he could. Another queen, FlamePetal, took care of them, nursing them until the sisters would become apprentices.

"You brought us a mouse?" DuskKit squeaked hopefully.

"Yes! Fresh from a patrol." Their father replied, pushing the prey forward with his paw.

"Wow! Really?" She asked, her green eyes wide.

"I wish we could catch our own prey..." Her sister murmured sadly.

He curled his tail around his paws, patiently keeping the conversation going. Suddenly, something seemed to cross his mind. "In fact," He meowed, "I could take you hunting..."

She was frozen, both in shock and excitement. "Outside *camp?*" Her sister mewed, well aware of the fact that kits aren't allowed out of camp, not until they were apprentices. But if they *did* hunt outside of the camp with their father, they would be safe...right?

AshTail sat up. "Would you like to?" He asked, Almost certain of the answer.

DuskKit and SteamKit glanced at each other, then back at the tom. Nodding swiftly.

Allegiances

LEADER: **HeartStar -** Large pure black she-cat with amber eyes

DEPUTY: **Dark'Pelt** - Black-and-gray she-cat

SENIOR ELDER: **Mumbleskip** - A golden and crème tabby she-cat

MEDICINE CAT: **TornVine -** Fluffy gray she-cat with green eyes

WARRIORS :

AshTail - Dark gray tom with green eyes

EucalyptusScreech - A brown and orange she-cat with green eyes.

RedEye - A ginger she-cat

DarkNight - A large dark cat with beaming amber eyes.

WebFang - A dark black tom with gray and white splotches

Wildthorn - Bluish-gray tabby tom

Drift'fur - Brown tom

Pikescratch - Large golden tom

LeatherFace- A half ginger, half black she-cat with mix-matched eyes

EchidnaThorn - Dark she-cat with amber eyes.

QUEENS: **FlamePetal -** Small ginger she-cat, Adopted mother of DuskKit (Silver she-cat with blue eyes), and SteamKit (Gray she-cat with green eyes).

APPRENTICES:

BatPaw - a pure black she-cat with amber eyes

MoonPaw -A white furred tom with green eyes and grey patches

Icarus'Paw - A golden tabby tom

Chapter 1

AshTail turned the corner, his daughters trailing behind. He glanced around wearily, stepping closer to the camp exit. Would he really do this? Lead his kits out of camp into the swamp? They trusted him...Yet, he would do whatever he had to for CrypticClan. Whatever had to be done.

"Where are you going, AshTail?" A voice mewed, stepping forward to block his view of the exit.

"Just for a hunt, BatPaw," He replied, meeting the apprentice's dark amber eyes.

BatPaw narrowed her eyes, "Then could I come? I haven't been out for training much," She mewed hopefully, not moving from where she stood.

"No." He meowed, stepping past her. "Ask EchidnaThorn to take you training." He waited for BatPaw to pad away, before gesturing for DuskKit and SteamKit to follow him out of camp. The sisters followed AshTail out of camp, SteamKit glancing over her shoulder one last time to look at the camp.

"We'll be back, won't we?" She mewed to her sister.

"Yeah! And with prey!" DuskKit purred, waving her long tail in the air.

"Come along," AshTail called, now reasonably far away.

SteamKit and DuskKit followed their father deeper into the forest, regret gripping her heart. Yet, her mind told her to keep going. Would something bad happen? If something did, AshTail would protect them. She knew for sure.

Chapter 2

DuskKit glanced back at her sister, the forest seeming to swallow them into its depths. She looked to AshTail, dashing to her father's side, her sister following.

AshTail stopped, looking around the clearing. Small shrubs surrounded them. *Perfect.*

"I'll be right back, stay here." He meowed, hesitantly looking back at his daughters. They looked terribly frightened, SteamKit's fur sticking up, and her sister's blue eyes wide.

"W-will you come back?" DuskKit mewed, turning to look at her father. AshTail opened his mouth to reply; only nodding slightly. The question hit him like the claws of an enemy warrior.

He stepped into the brambles, his long gray tail making a trail of dirt as he dragged it on the swampy ground.

As SteamKit watched her father disappear behind a clump of brambles, she felt a breeze ripple through her downy gray fur, she shivered, looking to DuskKit. She looked terrified...She stepped to her sister's side, her green eyes sparkling with worry.

"I can show you how to hunt," SteamKit mewed, purposefully trying to distract her sister from the fact they were alone.

"Would you?" Her sister asked, nodding to the idea.

"Yeah, of course!" SteamKit replied, dropping into the hunter's crouch. "Like this, from what WebPaw taught me, you keep your tail down," She dropped her tail to the earth.

DuskKit followed suit, slapping the ground with her tail, closing her eyes, she lifted her head to scent the woodland around her. It was dull with the scent of something... different...something she hadn't

smelled before, she couldn't place it...

"Good!" SteamKit squeaked, lunging for a pile of leaves, DuskKit stifled a laugh, failing completely, she burst out laughing at her sister's fall, rolling onto her back. SteamKit's head appeared from the foliage, she jumped to DuskKit, and the two sister's tussled.

Suddenly, a low pitched growl echoed through the forest, making SteamKit look around. "What was that...?"

DuskKit's eyes widened. "I don't know..." She stepped back, a quiver in her step.

The bracken shook, and the sisters jumped back in fear, SteamKit stepped in front of her sister, she couldn't do much to protect DuskKit, but she would try her best, all she could.

Chapter 3

The long, feathery plant shook again, and DuskKit stepped back along with her sister.

"SteamKit..." She mewed quietly, shaking with fear.

Her sister's green eyes were fixed on the plants, "It's probably just AshTail," SteamKit replied, glancing around them.

DuskKit didn't think their father could growl like that. Most definitely not that big, either.

SteamKit shrugged. "Let's just...go over to that tree trunk over there, it'll be fun to climb through it. We can race?" She suggested, pointing with her tail to a fallen tree trunk. Hollowed out almost completely.

DuskKit nodded, hesitantly turning her back to the ferns, and followed her sister over to the trunk.

She looked inside the tree, it was huge!

"Wow!" The sisters exclaimed, Duskkit climbed inside, and looked around. They could make this a hideout!

"Uh...D-Duskkit..." The young she-cat heard her sister mew.

"Yeah?" DuskKit asked, not looking back at her.

"RUN! RUN! GO!" Steamkit's squeak of terror could be heard, and it echoed in the log.

DuskKit looked back at her sister, and ahead of that, a black-and-white shape lumbered out of the bushes.

Duskkit's heart stopped, fear consuming her. It was like her legs were glued to the ground, and she was unable to move. She watched as the shape got closer and closer, Steamkit backing away

from it.

Chapter 4

Steamkit felt her blood pulsing in her ears, skittering back at the shape approached.

"Is that..a badger?" She heard her sister's squeak of terror from behind her, and she slowly got up.

The badger approached the log, placing its large paws on the log and rolling it over. Through a small hole in the log, Steamkit could see its beady black eyes, and it's black and white fur.

It then sniffed, using its nose to find the two kits.

"We need to go," Steamkit's heart was pounding inside her chest, and she backed away, and her sister followed suit.

The badger than appeared at the exit, but...smaller? No... It was another badger.

"Where is there to go?" Duskkit mewed, her voice panicked.

Steamkit skidded on bark as the first badger rolled the log again.

She glanced behind her, hoping they could escape that way.

She heard claws on bark and looked back towards Duskkit. The smaller badger was climbing towards them! It was trying to get them out!

She gasped, "Duskkit! We need to run! Run as fast as you can, okay?" She mewed, looking to her sister, who was frozen in place. She shook her. "Duskkit!"

Duskkit snapped back, and immediately bolted out of the log, Steamkit was surprised, and tried to follow her speed. The larger badger was there already, its large lumbering body hung over them, Blocking the way back to camp.

Steamkit glanced behind her, the tiny badger was coming up behind them.

They were going to be lunch.

Chapter 5

Flamepetal's yowl of terror filled the clearing. "Duskkit and Steamkit are gone!"

Webpaw blinked, and he glanced towards the nursery. It had been quiet, almost two quiet for the energetic pair.

"Webpaw, search patrol." He heard his mentor's voice, Northpeak, from behind him. Webpaw sighed, getting to his paws to follow Nightfall, Northpeak, and Sagepaw out.

"They're only three moons, they can't be far." NightFall mewed, although her voice was showing tiny signs of worry.

"Where's AshTail? These are his kits, he should be looking for them." Northpeak grumbled.

Webpaw shrugged, stopping in his tracks.

"Do you…smell that?" He heard his sister mew, her voice was shaking with fear.

He was frozen. The scent of a fierce, lumbering badger was strong here.

"Do you think.." Sagepaw swallowed, "Do you think it's Batpaw?" Sagepaw's green-eyed gaze was fixed on him for a reply.

Webpaw opened his mouth and was about to reply when he was interrupted by his mentor.

"Badger." Northpeak glanced back at the two apprentices."Stay close. Be ready to attack."

The four cats crept through the swamp, unsheathed claws making prints in the mud, until they came to a large fallen log.

The badger scent was almost overwhelming.

Dark amber drops were scattered around the clearing, and there was a still quietness. Then another scent came to him.

The scent of kits.

Chapter 6

Northpeak and Nightfall were already searching the area.

“Thank the Stars that badger left.” Sagepaw sounded relieved, but they still hadn’t found Duskkit or Steamkit yet.

Hopefully the badger hadn’t found the two sisters. Hopefully the blood was from a stubborn piece of prey.
Webpaw began searching, ducking into the fallen tree. There was nothing in there, only kit-scent and badger-scent.

“Oh no! Oh no, no, no!” Sagepaw’s mew came from a little ways away, the fear-scent clinging to her was strong.

Webpaw ducked out of the log, and came to his sister's side.
On the swampy ground in front of them, lay Duskkit.

Her usual white fluffy pelt was ragged and torn. Her usual bright, energetic blue eyes were closed, and blood poured from open wounds.

“NightFall! Northpeak! Come quick!” Sagepaw hissed, unsure what to do. She bent down, licking fiercely at the she-kit’s ragged pelt.

The two older warriors came up to them, both pausing to look over Duskkit.

“Sagepaw, take her home. Tell Torn’Vine.” Northpeak muttered.
“Go! Now!” His meow was urgent. Sagepaw nodded, quickly - but gently - picking up Duskkit and dashing away.

“Webpaw, search by the Twolegplace border for Steamkit.” He nodded towards the trees where Twolegplace was.

“Nightfall and I will go to the TorrentClan’s border.” With a flick of his tail, the two went off.

Webpaw stood there for a moment. With how severe Duskkit’s

wounds were, there was barely a chance that Steamkit was still alive. After all, they didn't find her after searching the area they found her sister in.

He began to head towards the border, his paws becoming heavy with mud.

In the distance, the image of large twoleg dens came into view, tiny drops of rain began falling from the gray sky, slowly soaking his pelt. He glanced around, hoping to find some sort of scent trail, but it was no use, the rain had already washed the scents away.

Chapter 7

“When Dusk falls, all will change. Remember this, AshTail." A small, pure white she-cat
with intelligent green eyes was speaking, though her eyes glinted with worry. “Please.”

The gray tom nodded, his expression was one of sadness. “SilentStream..please, don’t go. Don’t leave...” AshTail mewed softly, trying to step forwards. But everytime he did so, she seemed to get farther away.

Until all that surrounded him was darkness. The tom stared down, tears falling from his amber eyes.

…

DuskKit’s blue eyes blinked open. “Where am I?” She squeaked, her eyes blurred, looking around the strange, yet familiar den. Her bones ached, her muscles sore, she felt her fur damp, and the pungent smell of herbs surrounded her nose.

“The medicine den,” A raspy voice replied simply.

“What..?” As her eyes adjusted to the dim light inside the den, she felt her bones aching. She glanced beside her, expecting to see Steamkit’s gray beside her.

“Where’s Steamkit? Is she outside? Can I go see her?” She panicked, noticing how Torn’Vine’s green eyes filled with sorrow.

“What’s wrong? Sh-she’s outside, isn’t she? Just let me see her?” She tried to stand up, her legs wobbling, and pain filled her yet again.

“We don’t know.” The medicine cat murmured. “We don’t know where she is.”

Duskkit’s blue eyes widened, her heart seeming to stop. She felt

panicked, not knowing where her sister was broke her heart. They were always together; being apart for the first time made Duskkit shudder.

“TornVine, is she awake?” She heard another voice, Flamepetals. Duskkit paused, looking over her adoptive mother. Her fiery ginger pelt that gave her the name ‘Flamepetal’, as well as her stubbornness.

“Oh, Duskkit! Thank the Stars you're awake!” The queen padded over, giving Duskkit a worried lick on the ear. But the young she-kit didn’t say anything.

She knew she might not ever see her sister again.

Chapter 8

Steamkit lifted her head, her eyes blurred. She felt groggy, she felt her fur patted down with sticky herbs, almost making her gag.

"Duskkit? Duskkit, where are you?" She murmured, trying to adjust her eyes to the light, almost filling the den. Under her, she felt warm straw pricking her soft gray fur, making her wince. There was a drafty breeze filling the area, and finally, she saw where she was. It was a large, huge red den, with piles of hay scattered throughout the den.

"Berry! She's awake, finally!" Steamkit's ears turned towards the new voice, her green eyes studying the new cat. It was a she-cat, with a thick fluffy blue-gray coat, and her amber eyes shone playfully.

Another cat came into view, a small she-cat, coming from the entrance of the red den.

"Try to be nice, Blue." The second cat mewed softly, coming up to her.

"Welcome to the Barn, young one. I'm Berry, and this furball is Blue." Berry gestured with her tail to the blue-gray she-cat.

Chapter 9

Blue looks old enough to be an apprentice, Steamkit thought, glancing at the blue-gray she-cat curiously.

"Why...?" Her throat felt tight. "Why am I here?" She murmured, looking around. "Where's my sister?"

Blue looked puzzled for a moment. "You have a sister?" She asked, looking thoughtful. "I didn't s-"

Berry cut her off, slapping her tail to the younger she-cat's mouth. "We heard...well, cries for help. We came, took you here; Blue helped me with your wounds, and here we are." Berry recited, ending her story with a nod.

"And my sister? Did you find her?" Steamkit asked nervously, worry slowly filling her and making her feel uneasy.

Blue moved Berry's tail from her muzzle.

"We only found you." The young she-cat mewed.

Berry's blue-and-amber gaze was filled with sympathy, as Steamkit began to feel lightheaded, and her world seemingly crashed down on her.

"I'm sorry. I'm sure she's safe." The creme she-cat mewed softly.

Steamkit was frozen. Her sister was gone, the badger ruined everything. She stared at her paws, feeling like a part of her was torn away, and she was taken to a strange place before she could recover.

Chapter 10

"What's that?"

"Poppy seeds. Helps with shock and makes a cat sleepy,"

"What about that?"

"Catmint. Treats whitecough and greencough; may also help relax a cat."

It had been half a moon since the badger attack. Half a moon since Steamkit went missing. Half a moon since Duskkit became more interested in herbs.

Torn'Vine turned to her. "Now, then. What's this?" She gestured with a fluffy gray paw to a pile of white flowers with a yellow inside, along with a long, thin stalk.

Duskkit furrowed her brows, staring at the herb and trying to jog her memory. "Uhm...Is it..." She trailed off. "F...Feverfew! It's feverfew!" She squeaked, her eyes glowing.

"Nicely done, Duskkit." The medicine cat congratulated softly, sitting up stiffly. "Why don't you get some fresh air? Stretch your legs," She suggested, "Don't spend your kithood cooped up in this old den," The she-cat chuckled softly.

Duskkit shook her head quickly. "But I like the medicine den!" She whined, kneading the ground with her paws.

"I know, I know," The old medicine cat purred. "But even medicine cats need fresh air." With a nod, Torn'Vine left the den, But Duskkit didn't follow. She looked around the den, the cooling aroma of herbs and mixtures pressed against her. She felt at home here; she never wanted to leave.

"Duskkit! Come out and play!" Duskkit's thoughts were interrupted by a yowl. One of Flamepetal's litter. She sighed, she looked back at

the herbs.

She had to become a medicine cat.

She had to become Torn'Vine's apprentice.

Duskkit turned and left; the bright light outside almost blinded her. Blinking her eyes, she saw Pricklekit and Robinkit play-fighting along with the soothing chirps of birds, and cats sharing tongues around camp.

"Gotcha! Haha, told you I'd win!" Pricklekit boasted, getting off of her brother.

"Did *not!"* Robinkit retorted, shooting a glare at his sister, who was grooming her tortoiseshell fur.

Watching the two younger kits play made Duskkit feel a pit of longing in her stomach.

She missed Steamkit.

Most mornings, she would look beside her, hoping the badger attack was just a nightmare. A terrible, terrible nightmare. But her sister was never there...never by her side. Duskkit's mind told her to keep on hoping. Hoping that Steamkit was still out there...yet, a dark, shadowed part of her told her that her sister was *dead.*

Chapter 11

Steamkit blinked open her eyes, opening her jaws in a yawn. A paw prodded her side; Steamkit shifted.

"Oops! Sorry, didn't mean to hurt you!" Blue's voice mewed, apologizing.

Steamkit shook her head. "It's fine," She sat up, stretching.

"Come and eat," Berry's voice called from farther away.

Steamkit stood, realizing how hungry she had been, stood up and staggered over to the cream she-cat. Two mice lay in front of her.

Berry smiled warmly at her. "Good morning-" Berry trailed off, looking puzzled for a moment, before asking. "What *do* they call you? You haven't told us your name yet," Her question was gentle, more curious than demanding.

Steamkit felt hot with embarrassment, Berry and Blue had introduced themselves, but she hadn't bothered to tell them her name. "Oh...Sorry, I'm Steamkit." She mewed with a dip of her head, her mouth beginning to water at the smell of the prey.

"Go on then, Steamkit, take a bite." Berry nodded towards the prey, and Steamkit gave a grateful nod, taking a bite into the mouse. She felt the flavors melt on her tongue; it felt like she hadn't eaten in days.

Chapter 12

"Get up! Come on!" An annoyed mew came from her side. She felt groggy to say at the very least, a cold wind parting her soft fur.

"Clan meeting, sleepyhead!" Another voice chirped.

"Shut up," The first voice hissed.

Duskkit opened her eyes to see Robinkit and Pricklekit tussling. Expected.

She felt a rush of adrenaline, realizing what was happening. *Our apprenticeship!* Duskkit took a quick glance to her side, her blue eyes shining.

"Steamkit, we're gonna b-" She cut herself off, *Oh, no...I can't do this without Steamkit, can I?*

"Pricklekit, Robinkit, Duskkit, outside. Now." She then heard Flamepetal, realizing now that she had no choice but to become an apprentice without her sister. She thought back to the days when they would dream about becoming warriors, fighting alongside each other through everything. But they could never live that fantasy, could they?

"I said, now!" The queen sounded irritated, and finally Pricklekit and Robinkit stopped tussling, giving each other glares, then rushed past Duskkit, as if not even realizing she was there.

She met Flamepetal outside the nursery. The queen's amber eyes sparkled with pride; Duskkit noticed she seemed buzzing with energy.

A sudden call came from the CrypticClan leader.

"Let all old enough to roam the swamps gather here for a meeting," Heartstar's amber eyes glowed in the darkness; her shadowy black

fur blowing in the wind.

Duskkit felt bittersweet. Excited and fearful of the leader's presence. She's heard stories told many times by the older warriors, of Heartstar tearing apart many fierce warriors, drain lives with only one flick of her claws. Of course, Duskkit doubted these stories were true, but now, in the dark she-cat's presence, she felt that all of these tales of her sinister deeds were true.

"We gather today to appoint a new apprentice. It is about time now." Heartstar's eyes flicked to Duskkit, as she felt her heart stop, she was absolutely terrified.

"Duskkit, step forward."

Just as soon as she felt her heart stop, it began racing. She didn't know what to do. All this attention, all eyes on her. Duskkit felt her paws shake, creeping forward slowly, she came to just a tail-length apart from Heartstar.

"Now, we *should* have two apprentices to appoint," She growled. "But their recklessness got one killed. By a badger, as you all have heard."

Duskkit was taken aback, folding her ears. She held her tongue, knowing that replying wasn't a good option.

"Yet, we still have one, and we'll make good use of her." Heartstar's dark, amber gaze was fixed on Duskkit's small form. She felt a shiver go up her spine, not meeting the leader's gaze.

The CrypticClan leader took a breath to recite the words of the apprentice ceremony.

"Duskkit, you have reached the age of five moons, and it is time for you to be apprentices. From this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Duskpaw. Heartstar paused, casting a glance to Torn'Vine, who received it with a nod. "Your mentor will be Torn'Vine. She will pass down all she knows to you."

Chapter 13

It had been a moon since her ceremony.

A moon since she became Torn'Vine's apprentice.

A moon and a half since Steamkit went missing.

The full moon shone brightly in the night sky, showing light around the camp. She was waiting for Torn'Vine to accompany her to the Crystal Valley, as tonight was the full moon. Which meant Duskpaw's first gathering! She had been sleeping in the apprentices' den. She couldn't even put into words how much more comfortable it was. Without Pricklekit and Robinkit play-fighting all night, she had some good shut-eye.

(WIP)